

The Brookfield Railway
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Recent debate about a proposed Kenmore Bypass and an election proposal for the construction of a light railway in the western suburbs of Brisbane are just the latest chapters in a long and largely-unsuccessful campaign to improve public transport access to Brookfield. We can find out more about the history of this issue by learning about the Brookfield Branch Railway line, first proposed in the 1870s and 1880s, and never built.

In nineteenth-century Queensland, railways were the hallmark of progress and success. The three policies of European colonisation were assisted immigration, land-grants and railways, and any town or district that achieved all three was almost guaranteed success. Yet, as Queensland's eminent railway historian John Kerr pointed out in *Triumph of the Narrow Gauge: A History of Queensland Railways*, routes were determined by political realities, not economics. Every district wanted a railway, but only some were successful.

Brookfield was, due to politics, unlucky not to get a railway. In 1873, timber reserves for railway purposes were proclaimed in the parishes of Enoggera, Indooroopilly, Kholo and Moggill. This led some residents to agitate (unsuccessfully) for the construction of a railway from Brisbane to Ipswich on the northern side of the Brisbane River. Government priorities at the time lay elsewhere, particularly in the development of the colony's northern districts, and the project was apparently forgotten for another decade.

Though not rich in gold, like some places, Brookfield residents anticipated government support for the railway. Ten years later, in July 1884, 'A revival of the agitation for a branch line to Moggill, via Figtree Pocket, recently made in Brookfield', was reported in the newspapers. Supporters of the line claimed 'if a railway was constructed, there would be plenty of resources forthcoming to insure a sufficiency of traffic'.

An official survey of the 'Proposed Railway from Indooroopilly to Brookfield' was ordered, and in October 1884, a report by surveyor George Phillips was tabled in parliament. Phillips, who said he was accompanied by Mr. Cardell and Mr. Gibson from the Indooroopilly Divisional Board along the route and back, provided details of the railway 'as shown on the accompanying map'. He also mentioned the 'frequent razor-backed ridges' in the district, which, he said, presented 'great obstacles to the formation of good roads'. Nevertheless, he was 'surprised to find, that in spite of these natural difficulties, extensive road works have been carried out'.

I argue from this that there must be a considerable settled population using these roads, and that the district generally may be considered as one of some importance.

Phillips said he thought the area would be used for sugar-cane and fruit growing, 'whilst there is an almost unlimited choice of picturesque and healthy building sites for a very extensive suburban population'. Brookfield's chances were looking good.

The route of the proposed branch line, which began at the Indooroopilly railway station, ran beside the river to cross Witton Creek, near the present route of the Western Freeway. The line then followed the freeway's path, over Cubberla Creek near Fig Tree Pocket

Road, before ascending the ridge and following Kenmore Road. The line then descended to cross Moggill Creek to the proposed terminus near the Rafting Ground Reserve.

This, he said, was 'probably the best and perhaps the only practicable route for a Railway'; three medium-sized timber bridges would be needed and a high ridge (today's Kenmore Road) would have to be crossed. 'Extension', he said 'would probably be in the direction of Moggill, as Pullenvale and Brookfield are difficult of access'. Economy could be achieved, he added, 'if the trains that now run to Indooroopilly only could go on to Brookfield they would prove more remunerative and be a great convenience to many'. The cost of the four-mile (seven-kilometre) branch line was estimated to be 'approximately, £5,000 per mile'. His report was presented to parliament, but nothing happened.



In the mid-1880s was a time of consolidation in the colonisation of European Queensland. Most of the colony's major towns and cities were formed, and major industries established. The government's attention was focused on railway-building from the coastal ports of Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns, to their respective hinterlands. Closer to home, lines were approved from South Brisbane to Oxley, Beenleigh and Nerang. A survey of the Cleveland railway began in 1885, and the tunnel between Roma Street and Central Station was approved, after much controversy, in 1886. Each was criticised by opponents as expensive and unnecessary.

Still, some local residents believed Brookfield might yet gain her own branch line. In May 1886, an advertisement for a property named Mount Fair View, 'within a quarter of a mile of the proposed railway, one mile from Brookfield village, churches and school', appeared in the *Brisbane Courier*. The advertiser thoughtfully included an extract from George Phillips' survey report.

Two weeks later, the newspapers reported on a meeting held in the Divisional Board office at Taringa for the 'Brookfield Railway League'. 'The hall was packed to overflowing with residents of Figtree Pocket, Pullen Vale, Moggill and Brookfield'. Mr. Samuel Grimes, the member for Oxley, was elected to chair the meeting. He said 'he had ridden over the district to satisfy himself of the need of railway communication and what he saw then in the comparatively large farming population and in the timber and various other products along the route of the proposed railway extension, besides the comparatively large suburban population settling there, showed him the urgent need for railway communication'.

Prominent local resident Mr. Brimblecombe proposed the first resolution: 'That in view of the urgent need of the branch line to Brookfield from Indooroopilly further steps be taken to insure the early commencement of the work'. Brookfield, he said, had many resources but was 'more neglected than any other part of Queensland'. Mr. Gibson, who seconded the motion, said he knew of 'forty to fifty people who daily walk two or three miles to catch the train at Indooroopilly'. Other residents also spoke. After Messrs Patterson and Carver supported the motion, the resolution was carried unanimously. Mr. Gregory moved the next resolution: 'That a deputation wait on the Minister for Works to urge on him the desirableness of making a trial survey', which was seconded by Mr. Lane and also passed unanimously. 'Various other speakers' addressed the meeting, including Mr. J Butler who spoke about 'the enormous amount of slate and coal to be had in the district'.

Again (as usual!), there is no sign that government took any notice of the meeting, or of the motions passed there. The next news of the proposed railway appeared in late 1888, when 'A meeting of the residents of Brookfield was held on Thursday evening at the Public Hall to advocate the claims of the Moggill district to the construction of a railway'; a committee was appointed to organise meetings at 'Moggill, Kenmuir (obviously an early version of Kenmore) and other parts of the district'. Nothing came of this meeting.

Finally, in May 1889, a party of residents and property holders visited the Minister for Railways, HM Nelson, 'to urge the construction of a line to that district'. Mr. Grimes, the local member, introduced the deputation 'urging the construction of a branch line of railway from Indooroopilly through the Brookfield district, joining the Macalister (Ipswich) line on the north side of the Bremer River'. A trial survey had been made, 'no engineering difficulties were found to exist, and the line could be constructed at a reasonable cost'.

Another member of the deputation, Mr. Palmer, MLA, said 'he known the district only for a comparatively short time, and he did not think there was a finer suburb around Brisbane than could be established at Brookfield. The soil and climate were splendid; in fact there was everything that would make a suburb charming'. Mr. GW Gregory said he had been farming at Brookfield for the past twenty years and 'the soil was as rich as any round Brisbane. Farming at Brookfield was not carried out as extensively as it used to be; not because there was no land - there were hundreds of acres of scrub unfelled - but from the difficulty of getting goods into market'; Mr. Cardell said he 'had never seen a place better suited for dairying than the Brookfield district'; Mr. Brimblecombe spoke about the iron ore found in the district. Nelson said he would ask for more information but 'could not commit himself to any promise'.

At this stage, local residents apparently joined efforts with people from Tivoli, north of Ipswich, to have a railway built from Indooroopilly to Tivoli via Brookfield and Mt Crosby. In September 1889, a deputation met with Nelson (still the Minister for Railways). Petitions from 'the Brookfield and Tivoli sides of the river were presented', mentioning population, industry and resources. 'Mr. Moon, chairman of the Brookfield Committee, and Mr. Finlay pointed out the drawbacks from the Brookfield point of view the want of railway communication caused'. Yet again, government took no notice.

One part of this latest proposal was eventually built. In July 1890, the Minister for Railways and the Railway Commissioners 'inspected the route of the proposed Mihi-Indooroopilly railway'. The approval of the Tivoli branch line in 1895 led some to assume the railway would finally be built. However, the Tivoli line, opened in 1898, was only extended to Mt Crosby in 1913, where it was used to carry coal for the water treatment plant constructed adjacent to the weir. Apart from the weir, the railway went no further. According to railway historian John Kerr, the line carried no traffic after 1932, and was closed in 1965.

That was, apparently, the end of agitation for a Brookfield Railway. Just imagine how different the district would be if a branch line from Indooroopilly had been built during the nineteenth century! The topography of Brisbane's western suburbs and the lack of political clout combined to stop the line being built. In other parts of Queensland more vocal supporters managed to persuade government to build railways through much more rugged terrain and over much greater distances. The district could have become, if the proposal was adopted, a very different place to live. Brookfield might have been an important suburb for nineteenth-century commuters, well before freeways and busways were invented. Today, Moggill and Brookfield Roads, both originally constructed over one hundred years ago, remain the only major access routes to the Brookfield district.